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LIFELINE



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FOR WAR THRILLS ... ACTION ... DRAMA ...

No. 28 BATTLEGROUND

No. 29 TANK ALERT



The Special Air Service operated deep behind the enemy lines, sabotaging, ambushing and gathering vital information. This is the story of one of those fearless groups of warriors on wheels.



The gunners of the Eighth Army were fighting men, proudly taking their place beside the infantrymen in the thrust and counter-thrust of the long and bitter Western Desert Campaign.

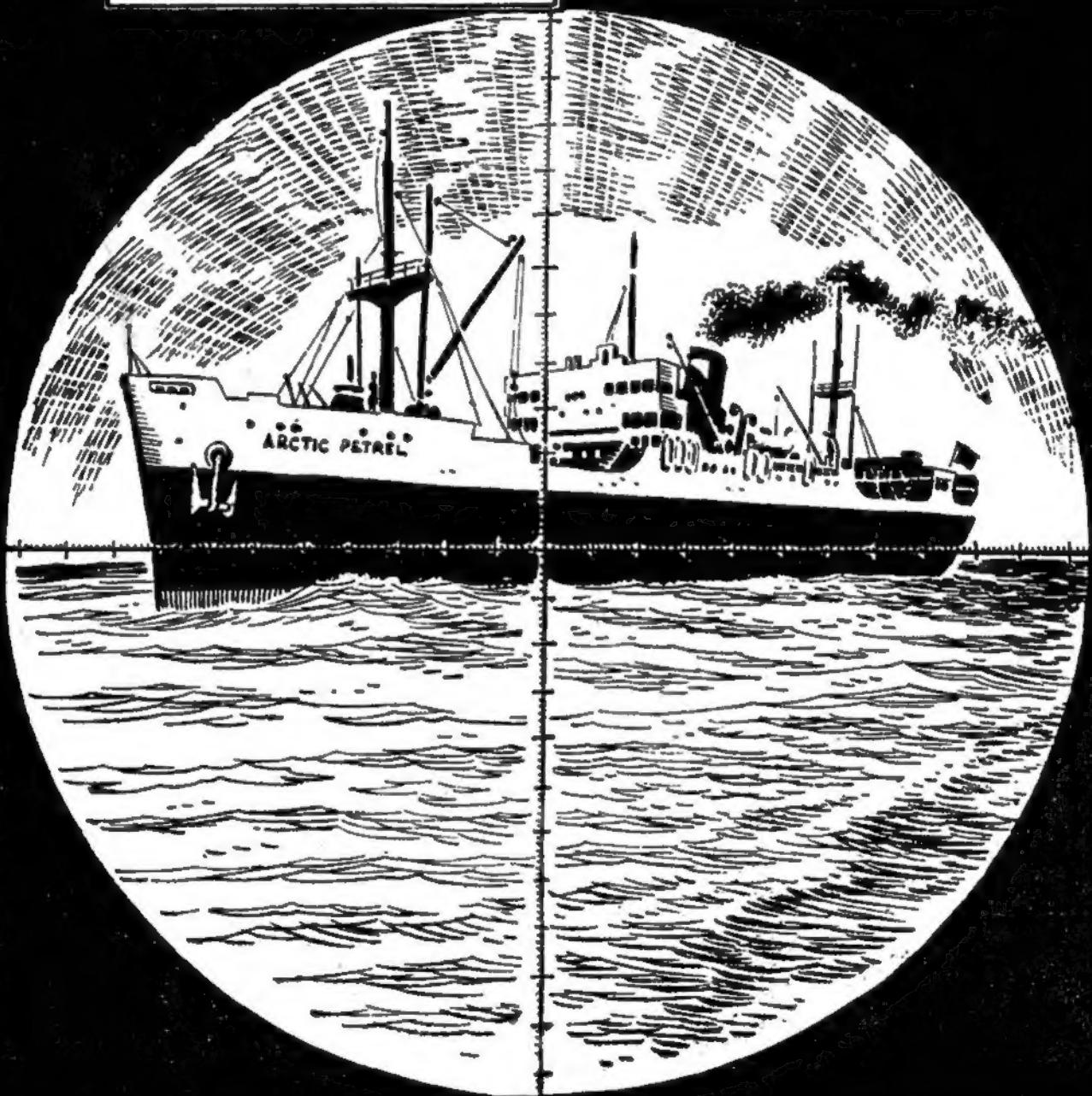
TOLD IN THRILL-PACKED PICTURES

NEXT MONTH'S three exciting issues are :—

- No. 30 SOLDIER OF FORTUNE
- No. 31 BEACH-HEAD
- No. 32 CONVOY

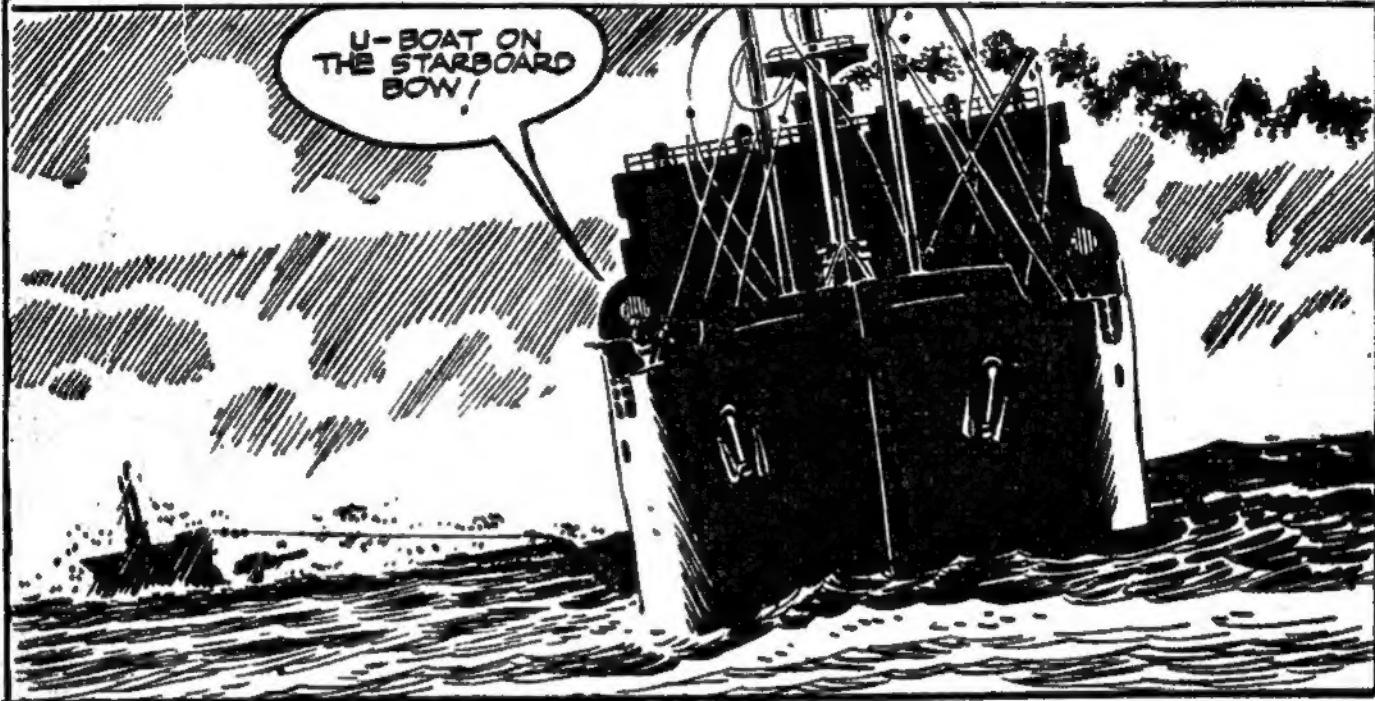
LIFELINE

IN THE SPRING OF 1940, THE UNDERWATER BATTLE FOR THE HIGH SEAS WAS GATHERING MOMENTUM. SOON IT WOULD REACH A CRESCENDO OF DEATH AS THE HUNGRY U-BOAT WOLF PACKS TORE AT THE THINLY-PROTECTED FLANKS OF THE ATLANTIC CONVOYS.



Chapter 1. ATTACK WITHOUT MERCY

BUT AS YET, THE GERMANS HAD NOT DEVELOPED THEIR VIOUS WOLF PACK TACTICS, AND THEIR SUBMARINES STILL HUNTED ALONE. AND SOMETIMES, LIKE U-76 RETURNING FROM PATROL OFF GREENLAND, THEY FOUND THEIR HELPLESS QUARRY ALSO ALONE, AND UNPROTECTED . . .



THE S.S. ARCTIC PETREL, 5000 TONS, BOUND FOR GLASGOW WITH A CARGO OF FISH MEAL FROM AKUREYRI IN ICELAND, WAS TWO HUNDRED MILES NORTH OF THE ORKNEYS WHEN HER LOOKOUT SIGHTED THE SINISTER GREY SHAPE TO STARBOARD . . .



THROUGH HIS BINOCULARS, THE NAZI COMMANDER WATCHED HIS VICTIM WITH RELISH. THIS WAS THE SORT OF SITUATION A U-BOAT COMMANDER DREAMED OF — AN UNARMED TARGET IN A SEA EMPTY OF THE FEARED BRITISH DESTROYERS.



THE GRIZZLED CAPTAIN OF THE ARCTIC PETREL GAVE STEADY ORDERS TO THE HELMSMAN AS U-76 HEAVED ITS UGLY SNOUT FROM THE GREY WATERS FIVE HUNDRED YARDS AWAY. BUT ESCAPE WAS A FORLORN HOPE.



THE GERMAN COMMANDER HAD NO INTENTION OF USING A TORPEDO ON THE BRITISH SHIP. HIS ORDERS BROUGHT THE GUN CREW CLATTERING FROM THE CONTROL TOWER. THE STAGE WAS SET FOR BRUTALITY . . .

TAKE YOUR TIME, MEN! WE SHALL HAVE A LITTLE TARGET PRACTICE WITH THIS POOR FOOL OF AN ENGLANDER!

READY, KAPITAN!



ON THE BRITISH MERCHANT SHIP, SEAMEN CROWDED TO THE RAILS. THEY EXPECTED A WARNING FROM THE U-BOAT BEFORE THE TORPEDOES CAME. WHAT WAS THE NAZI COMMANDER GOING TO DO? THE ANSWER WAS A VICIOUS ONE . . .



THE U-BOAT'S FIRST SHELL EXPLODED ON THE POOP DECK, KILLING TWO MEN. THE SECOND AND THIRD GOUGED ACRID HOLES IN THE WAIST. FROM THE BRIDGE, FIRST OFFICER FRANK WALSH SAW THE PURPOSELESS SHELLING WITH INCREDULOUS RAGE.



THE U-BOAT COMMANDER INTENDED TO BATTER THE DEFENCELESS BRITISH MERCHANT SHIP TO A SHAPELESS HULK BEFORE IT FINALLY SANK. NOT FOR HIM A CLEAN, SWIFT TORPEDO AFTER THE CREW WERE GIVEN TIME TO ESCAPE. THIS WAS MORE AMUSING.





ON THE BRIDGE OF THE BATTERED SHIP, THE CAPTAIN AND HIS FIRST MATE WATCHED THAT SLOW BOMBARDMENT IN HELPLESS AGONY OF MIND.

AT LEAST WE CAN STOP RUNNING AWAY FROM HIM, CAPTAIN. LET'S TRY TO RAM THE DEVIL!



THE CAPTAIN OF THE ARCTIC PETREL WAS OLD AND RESIGNED. TO SAVE AS MANY LIVES AS HE COULD WAS NOW HIS ONLY CONCERN. BUT FIRST OFFICER FRANK WALSH HAD OTHER IDEAS.

ABANDON SHIP, HELMSMAN! CAPTAIN'S ORDERS! BUT LASH THE HELM AND TELL THE CHIEF TO LEAVE THE VALVES OPEN AND THE ENGINES FULL AHEAD!



AS THE SEAMEN ON THE BRITISH SHIP LABOURED ON THE SHELL-SWEPT DECKS, THE NAZI U-BOAT COMMANDER STAMPED OUT A SPARK OF GENEROSITY AMONG HIS CREW.

I THINK THE BRITISH ARE LOWERING BOATS, KAPITAN! DO WE PICK UP SURVIVORS?

CERTAINLY NOT, LEUTNANT! WE HAVE OUR DUTY TO DO! GUN CREW, KEEP FIRING!

THE HULL OF THE ARCTIC PETREL SHUDDERED TO FRESH BLOWS, BUT ALREADY THE LIFEBOATS HAD BEEN LOWERED AND THE CREW WERE READY TO ABANDON SHIP. ONLY ONE MAN REFUSED TO GO . . .

COME WITH US, FRANK! YOU CAN'T DO ANY GOOD NOW.

I CAN GIVE THE OLD PETREL ONE LAST CRACK AT THOSE DEVILS BEFORE SHE GOES DOWN, CAPTAIN! I'M STAYING!

Lifeline

A SLOW, PROUD ANGER BURNED IN FIRST OFFICER FRANK WALSH'S CORNISH HEART. THE NAZI COWARDS SHOULD PAY FOR THEIR SENSELESS TORTURE OF AN UNARMED SHIP!



AS THE LAST BOAT CAST OFF FROM THE ARCTIC PETREL'S SIDE, FRANK MADE FOR THE WHEELHOUSE. THE BATTERED DECKS STILL THROBBED TO THE HEAVY BEAT OF THE UNENDED ENGINES . . .

ALL
RIGHT, HUNS,
DON'T GET
IMPATIENT!



NOW IT WAS ONE MAN AND A FLOATING HULK AGAINST THE SLEEK AND DEADLY U-BOAT. BUT THAT ONE MAN WAS HUNGRY FOR REVENGE . . .

COME ON,
OLD GIRL. THIS
IS WHERE YOU
GET YOUR OWN
BACK . . .



THROWING HIS WEIGHT AGAINST THE WHEEL, FRANK DRAGGED THE THRESHING WRECK OF THE ARCTIC PETREL TOWARDS HER MERCILESS EXECUTIONER, FIVE HUNDRED YARDS AWAY TO STARBOARD.

SO
THE ENGLANDER
COMES BACK FOR
MORE!



BUT THE MERCHANT SHIP'S MANOEUVRE WAS HOPELESSLY SLOW. THE NAZI U-BOAT COMMANDER TWISTED HIS LIPS IN A THIN SMILE AND GAVE CONTEMPTUOUS ORDERS . . .

HALF
AHEAD BOTH ! !
PORT TWENTY !
GUN CREW, I SHALL
KEEP THE TARGET
ON THE PORT BOW !
YOU WILL HOLE HER
ON THE WATERLINE
AND FINISH HER
OFF !



AS THE BATTERED BRITISH SHIP TURNED CLUMSILY ON HER ENEMY, THE SLEEK U-BOAT KNIFED WITH LAZY PRECISION INSIDE THE LUNGING BOWS. DESPERATELY FRANK WALSH WRESTLED WITH THE WHEEL.



BUT ON THE U-BOAT'S DECK, THE GUN SNAPPED WITH A NEW AND DEADLY INTENT. A SHELL BURST AGAINST THE ARCTIC PETREL'S STAINED HULL. A SECOND SHELL WAS THRUST INTO THE BREECH . . .

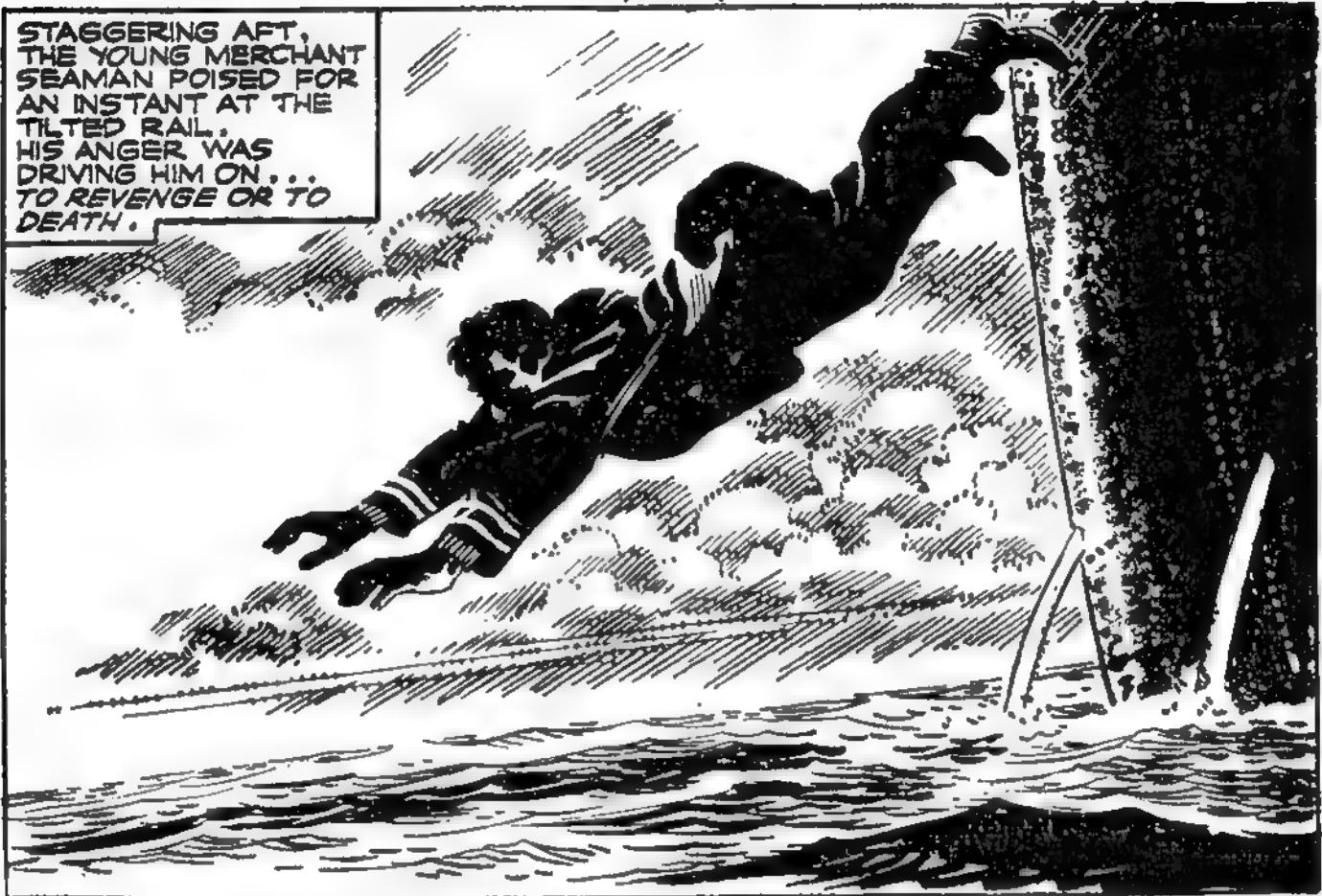


THAT SHELL WAS TO DELIVER THE LAST MORTAL BLOW TO THE CRUELLY MAULED SHIP. IT STRUCK HOME AT THE WATERLINE ABAFT THE ENGINE ROOM IN A Maelstrom OF CORDITS AND TORTURED WATER.





STAGGERING AFT,
THE YOUNG MERCHANT
SEAMAN POISED FOR
AN INSTANT AT THE
TILTED RAIL.
HIS ANGER WAS
DRIVING HIM ON...
TO REVENGE OR TO
DEATH.



ALMOST WITHOUT CONSCIOUS THOUGHT, FRANK WALSH STRUCK OUT TOWARDS THE U-BOAT. IT WAS BARELY TWO HUNDRED YARDS AWAY AND HE WAS A STRONG SWIMMER. AND AS HE SWAM, A VICIOUS VOICE PEG HIS RAGE.

WHY
HAVE YOU STOPPED
FIRING, DOLTS? HIT
HER UNTIL SHE
SINKS! HIT HER,
HIT HER!



THIS WAS A FORLORN VENTURE - ONE MAN ARMED ONLY WITH HIS COURAGE AGAINST A GERMAN U-BOAT. BUT NOW FRANK WALSH'S ANGER HAD DRIVEN HIM BEYOND THE REACH OF REASON . . .



GLOATINGLY, THE GERMAN GUN CREW WATCHED THE LAST AGONY OF THE DOOMED BRITISH SHIP. AND BEHIND THEM, THE VENGEFUL FIGURE OF ITS FIRST OFFICER HAULED HIMSELF FROM THE SEA AND LEAPED TO THE ATTACK . . .



FRANK'S BULL-LIKE RUSH TOOK THE NAZI COMMANDER UTTERLY BY SURPRISE. ONE MOMENT HE WAS SAFELY DIRECTING THE SLAUGHTER OF AN UNARMED SHIP AND ITS CREW, THE NEXT A GRIP LIKE DEATH WAS ON HIS THIN THROAT.

MERCY!

DID YOU HAVE MERCY, YOU SWINE?

MOMENTARILY STUNNED BY THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF THAT ATTACK, THE NAZI GUN CREW GAPED. A HARSH VOICE FROM THE CONNING TOWER JERKED THEM INTO BRUTAL ACTION. THE ODDS AGAINST FRANK WALSH WERE OVERWHELMING.

KILL THE MADMAN!

AS THE YOUNG CORNISHMAN SLUMPED UNCONSCIOUS BETWEEN HIS CAPTORS, THE BARREL OF THE PISTOL SWUNG TOWARDS HIS HEART. DEATH WAS TWO FEET AWAY WHEN THE NAZI COMMANDER SPOKE . . .

NO!
DO NOT
SHOOT! TAKE
HIM
BELOW!



MOVED BY A SUDDEN IMPULSE, THE NAZI COMMANDER HAD SPARED THE LIFE OF YOUNG FRANK WALSH. BUT NO GENEROSITY COULD HALT THE DEATH PLUNGE OF A GALLANT AND CRUELLY TORTURED SHIP.



WITH A COLD SIGH, THE NORTHERN WATERS CLOSED OVER THE BATTERED HULL OF THE ARCTIC PETREL AND THREE HUNDRED YARDS AWAY, ANOTHER VESSEL SLID BENEATH THE SAME ICY WAVES TO THE SINISTER GREEN TWILIGHT WHICH WAS ITS NATURAL ELEMENT.



FRANK WALSH HAD BEEN CARRIED TO A TINY COMPARTMENT IN THE BOWS OF THE U-BOAT. WHEN HE CAME TO, THIRTY MINUTES LATER, THE GAUNT FIGURE OF THE NAZI COMMANDER WAS STANDING OVER HIM.

YOU WISH TO KNOW WHY I SPARED YOUR LIFE, ENGLANDER? I WISH TO KNOW IT MYSELF! PERHAPS BECAUSE YOU ARE A BRAVE FOOL... AND ONE DOES NOT KILL FOOLS!



THE NAZI'S HARSH VOICE COULD NOT DAINT THE YOUNG CORNISHMAN NOR HIS WORDS QUENCH THE ANGER IN HIS HEART...

YOU WILL BE TRANSFERRED TO A PRISON SHIP WHEN WE REACH NORWAY, MY FRIEND! AND YOU WILL LEARN TO LEAVE THE FIGHTING TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN TRAINED TO FIGHT!

TRAINED TO MURDER, YOU MEAN!



Chapter 2. PRISON SHIP

FOR THIRTY SIX HOURS, FRANK SAT ALONE WITH HIS BITTERNESS IN THAT TINY CELL BEHIND THE THIN HULL OF THE SUBMARINE. AND THEN THE RHYTHM OF THE ENGINES CHANGED... THE U-BOAT HAD SURFACED.



THIS WAS ARSAFIORD IN SOUTHERN NORWAY. FARTHER NORTH, AT THIS VERY MOMENT, THE LAST BRITISH TROOPS WERE EMBARKING AFTER THEIR BITTER STRUGGLE AGAINST OVERWHELMING ODDS TO KEEP THE NAZI HORDES AT BAY. NOW NORWAY WAS OCCUPIED, AND HER FIORDS WERE FULL OF GERMAN U-BOATS... AND PRISON SHIPS.



THE PRISON SHIP WAS THE LANGSTROM. AMONG HER PRISONERS WERE TWO BRITISH NAVAL OFFICERS, LIEUTENANT MICHAEL HUGHES AND SUB-LIEUTENANT VICTOR GOLD, SURVIVORS OF A DESTROYER SUNK BY STUKAS. WITH BITTER EYES THEY WATCHED U-76 COME ALONGSIDE...



MIKE HUGHES SAW THE STOCKY FIGURE DRIVEN UP THE GANGWAY TO CAPTIVITY WITH A PANG OF SYMPATHY. HE KNEW THE DEGRADATION OF THIS MOMENT IN A MAN'S LIFE. FORCING CHEERFULNESS INTO HIS VOICE, HE LEANED FORWARD...



FRANK ANSWERED THE CHEERFUL WORDS WITH A TAUT SMILE. HE WAS AMONG FRIENDS NOW — BUT HE KNEW THAT THE ANGER IN HIS HEART WOULD NEVER GIVE HIM PEACE.

SO, YOU REFUSE TO TALK! AND YET YOU OWE YOUR LIFE TO THE GENEROSITY OF THE U-BOAT COMMANDER! UNGRATEFUL PIG! TAKE HIM BELOW, GUARD!



THE COMMANDANT OF THE LANGSTROM WAS A BULLET-HEADED PRUSSIAN WHO HAD COME BACK FROM RETIREMENT TO BULLY THE HATED ENGLISHMEN IN HIS POWER. SNARLING, HE SENT FRANK WALSH BELOW...



MIKE HUGHES AND VICTOR GOLD GREETED THE YOUNG MERCHANT NAVY OFFICER, HUNGRY FOR NEWS OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD. WARMED BY THEIR SYMPATHY HE BEGAN TO TALK...

... SO THE JERRY U-BOAT PUMPED SHELLS INTO US FOR TWO SOLID HOURS, UNTIL THE SHIP WAS A BATTERED WRECK, JUST USED US FOR TARGET PRACTICE AND KILLED HALF OUR CREW, THE MURDEROUS SWINES!

I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL!



THERE WAS MUCH BITTERNESS IN THE FOUL HOLD OF THE LANGSTROM, BUT IN THE HEART OF FRANK WALSH, IT BURNED WITH A SPECIAL VIOLENCE...

DO YOU KNOW? I DOUBT IT! YOU NAVY TYPES HAVE GUNS TO HIT BACK WITH, AND ALL WE HAD AGAINST THAT SWINE OF A U-BOAT WAS OUR HANDS! HOW CAN YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE ALWAYS TO BE ON THE RECEIVING END OF THE PUNISHMENT AND NEVER TO HIT BACK - YOU'RE NOT IN THE MERCHANT NAVY!

AS THEY SETTLED FOR SLEEP, MIKE HUGHES GAVE THE YOUNG CORNISHMAN A WORD OF PAINFULLY ACQUIRED WISDOM . . .

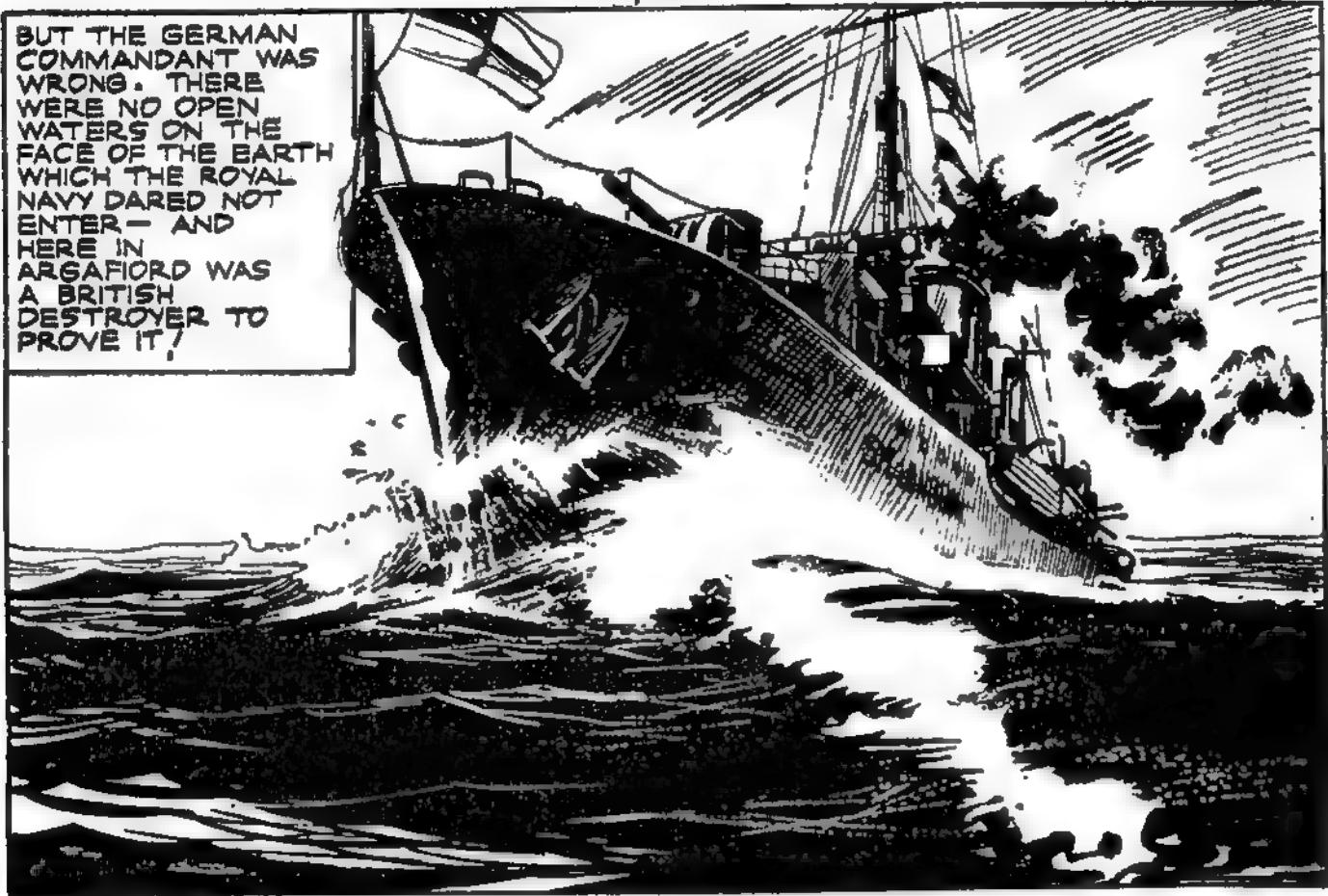
WELL, WE'RE ALL OF US OUT OF THE FIGHT NOW, FRANK! IT'S BETTER TO FORGET YOUR BITTERNESS WHEN YOU'RE A PRISONER OR YOU'LL GO CRAZY!

THANKS, MIKE! BUT MAYBE I'LL GET THAT CHANCE TO FIGHT. AND BY HECK, IF IT COMES, I'LL TAKE IT!





BUT THE GERMAN COMMANDANT WAS WRONG. THERE WERE NO OPEN WATERS ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH WHICH THE ROYAL NAVY DARED NOT ENTER— AND HERE IN ARGAFIORD WAS A BRITISH DESTROYER TO PROVE IT!



H. M. S. LONGBOW THRUST UP THE NARROW FIORD AT A DEFIANT 25 KNOTS TOWARDS THE UGLY BULK OF THE GERMAN PRISON SHIP.

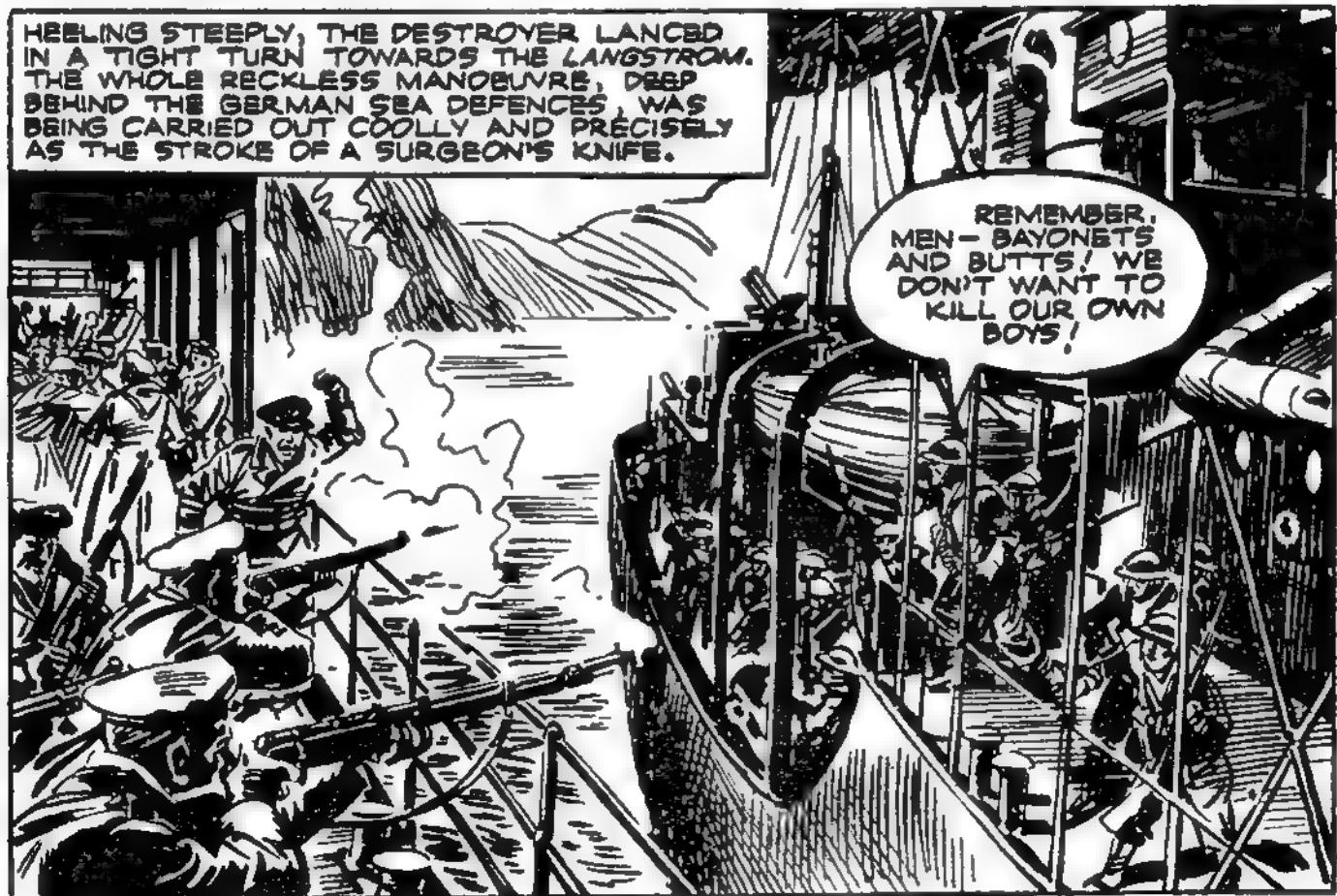
BOARDING PARTY, FALL IN!





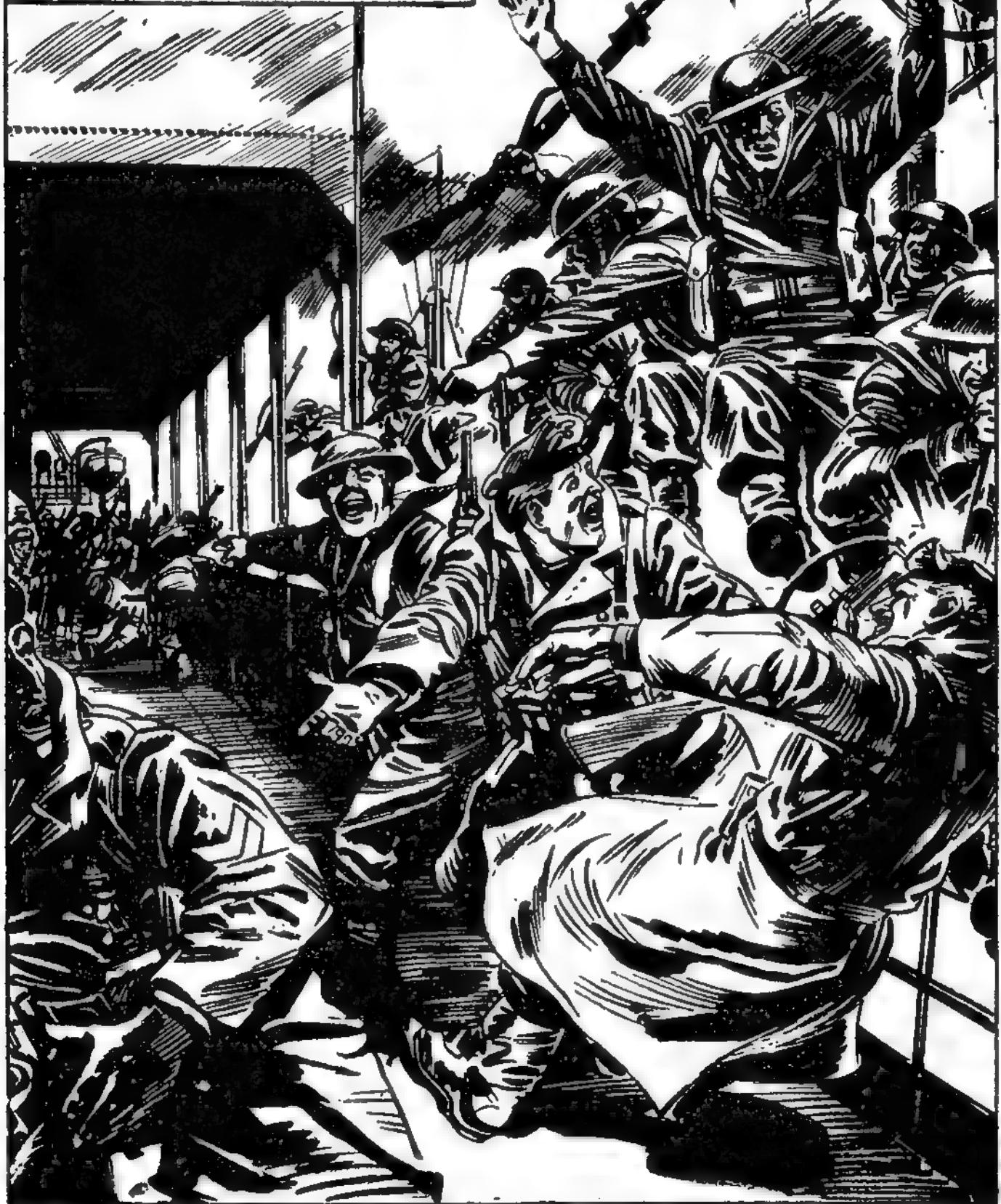


THE LONGBOW WOULD PASS THE LANGSTROM ON THE PORT SIDE. TURN AND RUN ALONGSIDE WITH HER BOWS AIMED AT THE OPEN SEA READY FOR THE RETURN DASH TO SAFETY. SPEED WAS ESSENTIAL. ALREADY THE LANGSTROM'S WIRELESS WAS CHATTERING WITH FRIGHTENED MESSAGES.



AS THE GAP BETWEEN THE TWO SHIPS CLOSED, THE BRITISH BLUEJACKETS GRIPPED THEIR RIFLES AND FLEXED THEIR MUSCLES. THE DECK SHUDDERED UNDER THEIR FEET AS THE SCREWS THUNDERED INTO REVERSE. THEN ...

HERE
WE COME,
MATES!



EVEN BEFORE THE GAP BETWEEN THE SHIPS HAD CLOSED, THE BRITISH SEAMEN WERE LEAPING THE RAIL. RIFLE BUTTS SWUNG WITH DEADLY EFFECT AS THE GERMAN GUARDS TURNED SAVAGELY AT BAY. AND NOW THE PRISONERS TOOK A HAND.



FILLED SUDDENLY WITH A WILD FURY, FRANK WALSH FELLED THE NAZI NEAREST HIM WITH ONE SAVAGE BLOW. NOW ALL HIS BITTERNESS WAS SWINGING IN HIS CLENCHED FISTS.

NOW
IT'S MY TURN,
YOU DEVILS!

THERE'S
MORE OF US IN THE
HOLD, MEN!
FOLLOW
ME!

THE FIGHT WAS VIOLENT AND BRIEF.
THE GERMAN GUARDS HAD NO
CHANCE TO USE THEIR RIFLES AND
NO STOMACH TO RESIST THAT
DARING BRITISH ATTACK. SOON
THE JOYOUS PRISONERS WERE
POURING UP FROM THE LANGSTROM'S
HOLD.

HEY, FRANK!
LEAVE IT TO THE
NAVY AND GET
ABOARD!

ON THE BRIDGE OF THE 'LONGBOW', THE BRITISH CAPTAIN COOLLY WATCHED THE FIGHT. ALREADY THE MINUTES WERE SLIPPING AWAY . . .

SIR! COMING UP THE FIORD AT SPEED!

COME ABOARD, MEN!
I SHALL CAST OFF IN THREE
MINUTES FROM NOW!

AS THE LAST OF THE PRISONERS CROSSED TO THE FREEDOM OF THE BRITISH DESTROYER'S DECK, THE GERMAN GUARD BOATS CAME SNARLING UP THE NARROW FIORD TOWARDS THE RECKLESS 'LONGBOW'.

THAT'S HOW I LIKE IT - A FIGHT THE NAVY WAY!

THAT'S THE LOT OF YOU, IS IT?

Lifeline

FRANK WALSH WAS GRINNING FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THREE DAYS AS HE STOOD ON THE DESTROYER'S THROBBING DECK. AND BEHIND HIM ON THE BRIDGE OF THE LANGSTROM . . .

THE BRITISH HAVE CAST OFF, COMMANDANT! WE ARE SAFE!

AH, SAFE, YOU SAY! AND WE HAVE THE GAULIC TERR TO EXPLAIN THIS TO!

THE BULLYING GERMAN COMMANDANT HAD FOUND A NEW FEAR TO WORRY OVER - THE WRATH OF HIS SUPERIOR OFFICER. AND HE WAS STILL QUAVERING BEHIND THE BRIDGE SCREEN WHEN THE BREEZY VOICE ON THE LOUD HAULER REACHED HIM WITH AN OMINOUS MESSAGE.

AHOY, LANGSTROM! WE HAVE PLACED A TIME BOMB IN YOUR HOLD! YOU HAVE TEN MINUTES TO ABANDON SHIP! I SUGGEST YOU TAKE TO YOUR BOATS IMMEDIATELY.



EXACTLY ELEVEN MINUTES AGO, THE GERMAN OFFICER HAD BEEN BROWBEATING HIS PRISONERS IN THE SECURITY OF HIS SHIP. NOW THAT SHIP WAS PLUNDERED AND DOOMED, AND HE WAS SCUTTLING FOR HIS LIFE ACROSS THE LITTERED DECK ...



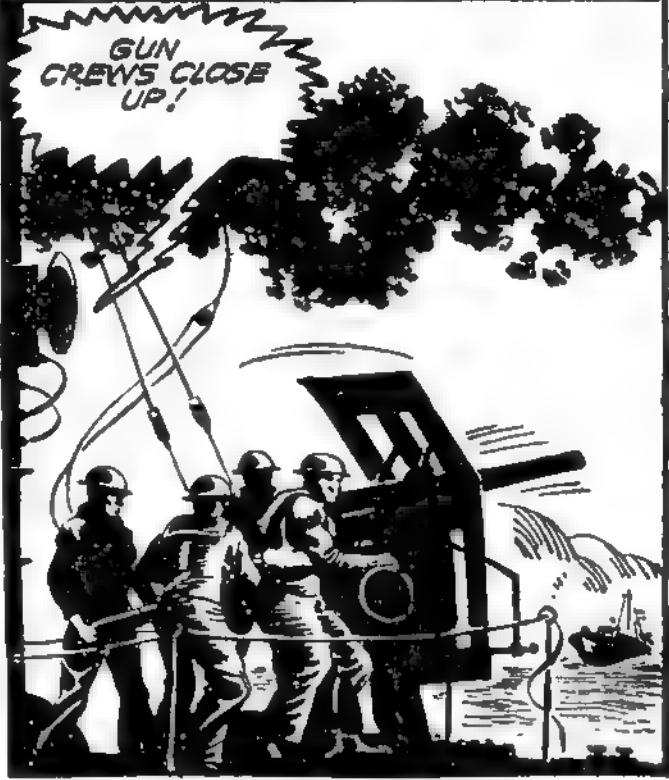
LOADED WITH THE MEN SHE HAD RECKLESSLY SAVED, THE LONGBOW HEADED FOR THE OPEN SEA WITH THE GERMAN E-BOATS IN HOT PURSUIT.



THE THREE MEN, SO LATELY HOPELESS PRISONERS, STOOD AT THE RAIL OF THE DESTROYER, HARDLY AWARE OF THE FRESH DANGER CLOSING FAST FROM ASTERN . . .



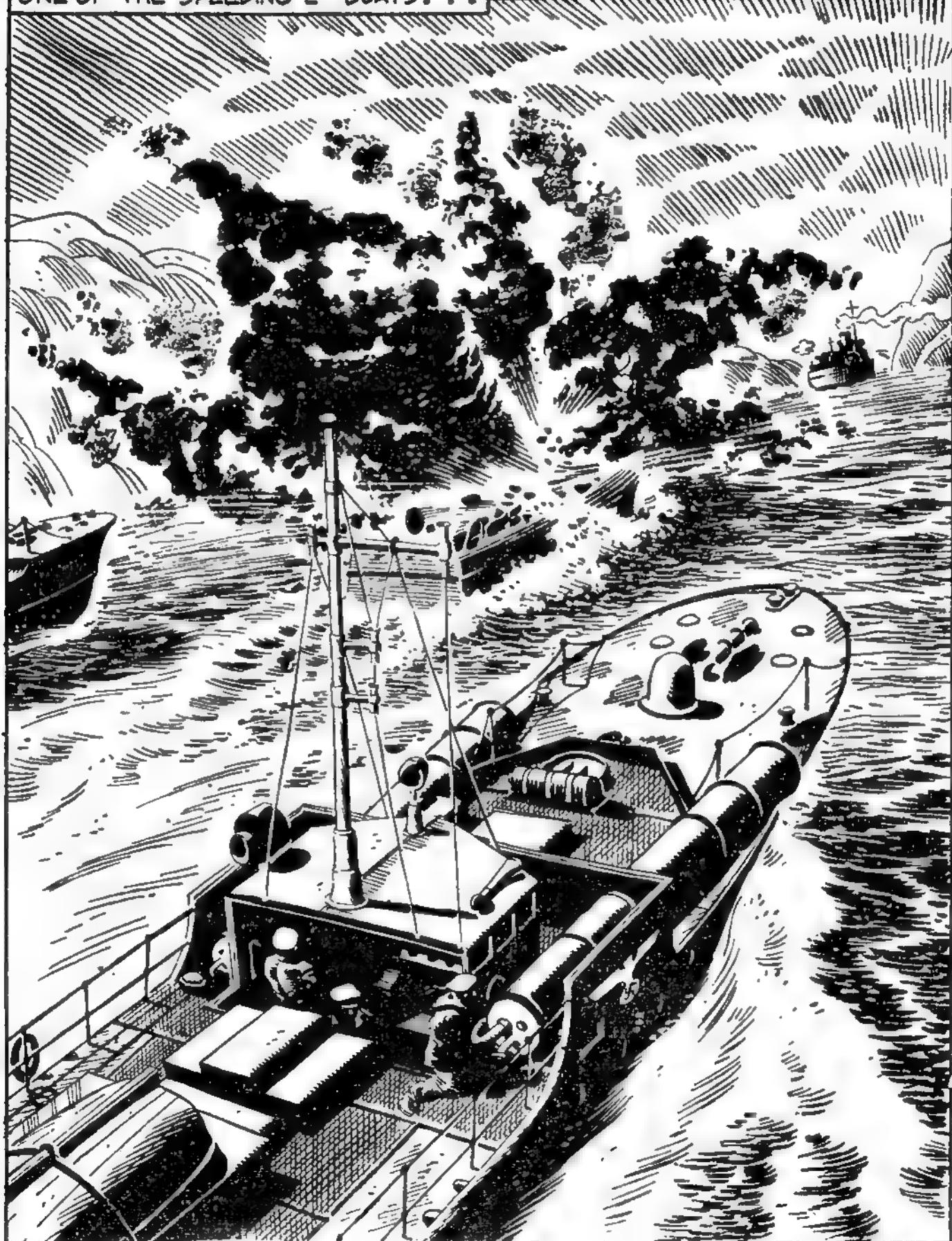
BUT ON THE BRIDGE, THE CALM ORDERS WERE GIVEN AND CALMLY CARRIED OUT. THE LONGBOW WAS AN EFFICIENT WEAPON OF WAR IN DARING BUT EFFICIENT HANDS . . .



AS THE E-BOATS CAME INTO EXTREME RANGE, THE DESTROYER'S RANGE-FINDER PLOTTED THEIR POSITION AND RELAYED THE FIGURES TO THE AFT SIX-INCH GUN. SMOOTHLY THE WICKED BARREL SWUNG UP . . .



PRECISE CALCULATIONS, SMOOTH MACHINERY, AND COOL HUMAN HANDS SENT THAT DEADLY PROJECTILE SPINNING THROUGH THE AIR TO FALL PLUMB ON ONE OF THE SPEEDING E-BOATS . . .



THE FIRST SHELL BLEW ONE E-BOAT CLEAN OUT OF THE SEA. THE SECOND CASCADED WATER ON TO THE DECK OF ANOTHER ENEMY VESSEL AND SWAMPED IT. THE THIRD BOAT CHECKED, DAUNTED BY THE VICIOUS ACCURACY OF THE BRITISH GUNS.

SPOT
ON, NAVY!



THE SPEED AND DARING OF THE NAVY'S FORAY INTO THE HEAVILY GUARDED FIORD HAD TAKEN THE ENEMY DEFENCES UTTERLY BY SURPRISE. AND NOW THE STING IN THE DESTROYER'S TAIL HAD ROUTED THEM.



AS THE LONGBOW CLEARED THE MOUTH OF THE FIORD, A THUNDEROUS EXPLOSION AND A MOUNTING COLUMN OF BLACK SMOKE BEHIND HER PUT A VIOLENT POSTSCRIPT TO AN EPIC EXPLOIT.



AS THE TWO NAVY MEN TURNED BACK AGAIN FROM THE RAIL, THEY SAW A FIERCE DETERMINATION IN THE HOMELY FACE OF THE YOUNG MERCHANT NAVY OFFICER.



THE LONGBOW'S GALLANT ACTION HAD FIRED THE IMAGINATION OF FRANK WALSH. NOW HE HAD EXPERIENCED THE SATISFACTION OF HITTING THE ENEMY— AND HITTING HARD. EVEN VICTOR GOLD'S COOL TONES COULD NOT DETER HIM...



LET THE NAVY TAKE FRANK WALSH BACK TO ROSYTH. THEY WERE NOT GOING TO SEND HIM BACK TO SEA ON A MERCHANT SHIP. HE HAD HAD ENOUGH OF THAT HELPLESSNESS WHICH THE COMMANDER OF U-76 HAD SO BRUTALLY EXPLOITED.

WHATEVER HAPPENS, THEY'RE NOT PUTTING ME BACK ON THE RECEIVING END!
I WANT TO FIGHT—
WITH THE NAVY!



Chapter 3. USELESS STOWAWAY

FRANK, GOOD-NATUREDLY BORE THE CHAFF OF THE TWO NAVAL OFFICERS AS THE LONGBOW THRESHED BACK ALL THAT DAY ACROSS THE WINTRY NORTH SEA. THIS LETHAL MAN-OF-WAR WITH ITS SINEWS OF STEEL WAS THE SORT OF CRAFT FOR HIM.



BUT BELOW DECKS, EVENTS WERE MOVING FAST. PLUCKED FROM THE AIR BY SENSITIVE ANTENNAS HIGH ON THE PLUNGING MASTS, A WIRELESS MESSAGE WAS STUTTERING INTO THE HEADPHONES OF THE TELEGRAPHIST LISTENING OUT ON FLEET WAVE.



Lifeline.

AS THE CODER TRANSLATED THE MESSAGE INTO PLAIN LANGUAGE, HIS FACE LENGTHENED GLOOMILY. THERE WOULD BE NO LIBERTY RUN ASHORE IN ROSYTH FOR THE LONGBOW'S SHIP'S COMPANY.

WE'RE TO EXPEDITE DISEMBARKATION OF PRISONERS AT ROSYTH, NUMBER ONE! WE SAIL IMMEDIATELY TO JOIN CONVOY X FOUR OFF STAVANGER!

BUT WE'RE TWO OFFICERS SHORT OF COMPLEMENT, SIR! AND THAT MEANS LEAVING ROSYTH BEFORE THE REPLACEMENTS JOIN US FROM POMPEY!



THE FIRST LIEUTENANT'S RECEPTION OF THE MESSAGE WAS ALSO GLOOMY. CONVOY WORK WAS A SEVERE STRAIN EVEN ON A FULL SHIP'S COMPLEMENT. TO FIGHT A FIERCELY-CONTESTED CONVOY BATTLE WITH TWO MEN MISSING WAS ASKING FOR TROUBLE.

WE'LL HAVE TO SAIL SHORT-HANDED, NUMBER ONE! IT'S A PITY, BECAUSE X FOUR'S THE LAST CONVOY OUT OF NORWAY AND THE JERRIES WILL BE GIVING US A HOT TIME! WE'LL HAVE TO DO THE BEST WE CAN!



OVERBEARING THE CAPTAIN'S REGRETFUL WORDS,
LIEUTENANT MIKE HUGHES SEIZED HIS CHANCE...

LIEUTENANT MICHAEL HUGHES REPORTING, SIR! SUB-LIEUTENANT GOLD AND I SERVED ON THE S'ROCCO UNTIL SHE WAS DIVE-BOMBED OFF OSLO! I'M A GUNNER AND GOLD IS SIGNALS - WE'D BE GLAD TO MAKE UP YOUR COMPLEMENT IF YOU'LL HAVE US, SIR!

S'ROCCO, EH? THAT WAS POOR ROGER'S SHIP - DEUCED GOOD ONE, TOO! WELL, HUGHES, WE'LL ACCEPT YOUR OFFER! NUMBER ONE WILL SHAKE YOU DOWN! GLAD TO HAVE YOU ABOARD!



THE CAPTAIN OF THE LONGBOW ACCEPTED THE TWO VOLUNTEERS WITH ALACRITY. THEY WERE TRAINED DESTROYER MEN, WHEREAS THE EquALLY EAGER FRANK WALSH...

CAPTAIN, CAN YOU MAKE USE OF ME, TOO? I'M FRANK WALSH, FIRST OFFICER MERCHANT SERVICE! CAPTAIN, YOU'VE GOT TO LET ME FIGHT!



I'M SORRY, MISTER WALSH, THAT WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE!

THE CAPTAIN'S WORDS WERE KINDLY AND WELL-MEANT BUT THEY SHATTERED FRANK'S HOPES.

THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT WAYS OF FIGHTING, MISTER WALSH, AND I SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT THE MERCHANT NAVY WAY WAS ONE. A DAMNED BRAVE ONE TOO. BUT A WARSHIP LIKE MINE IS A COMPLICATED PIECE OF MACHINERY AND IT NEEDS SPECIALLY TRAINED MEN TO FIGHT IT. I'M AFRAID THAT LETS YOU OUT!

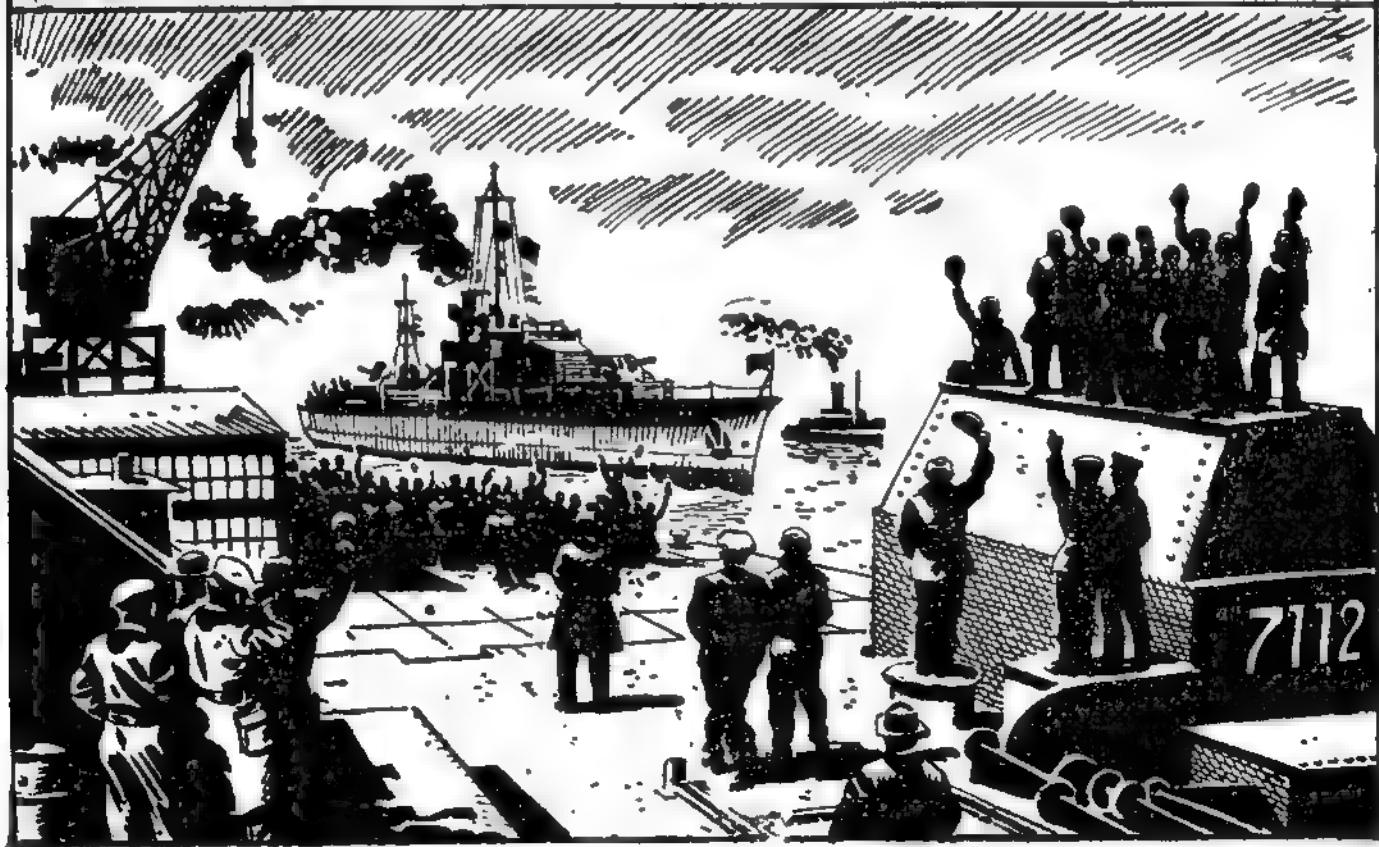


Lifeline

FRANK WATCHED THE SENIOR NAVAL OFFICER GO WITH A BITTER FROWN. HE HAD MADE UP HIS MIND THREE DAYS AGO UNDER THE CRUEL PERSUASION OF U-7D'S SHELLS. WORDS WOULD NOT MAKE HIM CHANGE IT NOW...



FOR THE REST OF THAT BRIEF VOYAGE, FRANK MADE HIMSELF SCARCE. NEITHER MIKE NOR VICTOR HAD SEEN HIM AGAIN BY THE TIME THE LONGBOW SAILED INTO THE NAVAL DOCKYARD AT ROSYTH, TO A HERO'S WELCOME...



SOON THE RESCUED PRISONERS WERE POURING OFF THE LONGBOW TO THE JETTY. BUT STILL THERE WAS NO SIGN OF THE YOUNG CORNISHMAN!

FRANK WALSH DIDN'T SAY GOODBYE TO US! I SUPPOSE HE'S PRETTY CHOKKER WITH THE NAVY!

IT'S NO GOOD BEING SENTIMENTAL, MIKE. FRANK'S GOT THE GUTS, BUT HE FIGHTS LIKE A BULL! YOU NEED TRAINING AND FINESSE TO FIGHT IN THE MODERN NAVY, AND OUR FRANK WAS JUST A HORNY-HANDED SAILOR BOY!



VICTOR GOLD'S WORDS WERE HARSH, BUT PERHAPS THEY WERE JUST. . . THERE WOULD NEVER BE A CHANCE TO PROVE IT - OR SO MIKE HUGHES THOUGHT AS, AN HOUR LATER, THE LONGBOW SET OFF FOR A FRESH BATTLE, LEAVING THE PRISONERS SHE HAD RESCUED CHEERING ON THE QUAY.



Lifeline.

BUT ALL THAT FIRST NIGHT OF THE VOYAGE BACK TO THE NORWEGIAN COAST, MIKE FOUND HIMSELF THINKING ABOUT FRANK WALSH, AND AT DAWN, AS THEY WEARED STAVANGER . . .



WITH THE FINE SCORN OF THE TRAINED FIGHTING MAN, VICTOR GOLD DISMISSED THE YOUNG MERCHANT NAVY OFFICER. BUT FRANK WALSH WOULD NOT BE DISMISSED SO EASILY . . .



STIFF AND COLD FROM HIS LONG VIGIL,
BUT STILL FULL OF FIGHT, FRANK
FACED THE TWO NAVY MEN.



WITH A SYMPATHETIC GRIN, AND A CERTAIN ADMIRATION FOR HIS FRIEND, MIKE LED FRANK WALSH TO THE LONGBOW'S BRIDGE...



BUT THE DESTROYER CAPTAIN WAS NOT SO IMPRESSED. HE HAD A FIGHTING MACHINE TO COMMAND AND THERE WAS NO PLACE IN IT FOR THE AMATEUR, HOWEVER ENTHUSIASTIC.



Lifeline

AND EVEN AS THE CAPTAIN SPOKE, THE REASON FOR HIS SEVERITY LAY JUST OVER THE HORIZON. CONVOY X4 WAS COMING UNDER THE VICIOUS FIRE OF THE MARAUDING GERMAN STUKAS...

ACHTUNG!

A BRITISH
DESTROYER
APPROACHES!
FOLLOW
ME!



THE CONVOY WAS BRINGING BACK THE MEN AND STORES OF THE LAST BRITISH FORCES EVACUATED FROM NORWAY. THE GERMANS HAD NO INTENTION OF LETTING IT ESCAPE. AND AS THE STUKAS TURNED HUNGRILY ON THE LONE BRITISH DESTROYER...



TO THE SHRILLING ALARM BELLS, THE HIGHLY TRAINED CREW OF THE LONGBOW WENT COOLLY INTO ACTION. ONLY ONE MAN ON THAT FIGHTING SHIP WAS OUT OF PLACE...



FRANK WALSH HAD NO ACTION STATION TO GO TO AS THE SCREAMING DIVE BOMBERS POUNCED OUT OF THE SKY ON THEIR PREY. THE DESTROYER AND ITS CREW WERE NOW A SINGLE AND LETHAL INSTRUMENT OF WAR.



ONE STUKA WAS HIT BY THE LONGBOW'S ACCURATE FIRE BEFORE THE ATTACK DEVELOPED. A SECOND FLAILED DOWN ON THE PORT QUARTER AND ITS BOMBS BURST CLOSE ALONGSIDE. THE HAMMERBLOW CONCUSSION SWEPT THE OERLIKON PLATFORM . . .



AS THE OERLIKON GUNNER TOPPLED, FRANK WALSH SAW HIS CHANCE. NOW AT LAST HE HAD A GUN IN HIS HANDS— NOW AT LAST HE COULD HIT BACK AT THE BRUTAL ENEMY. BUT . . .



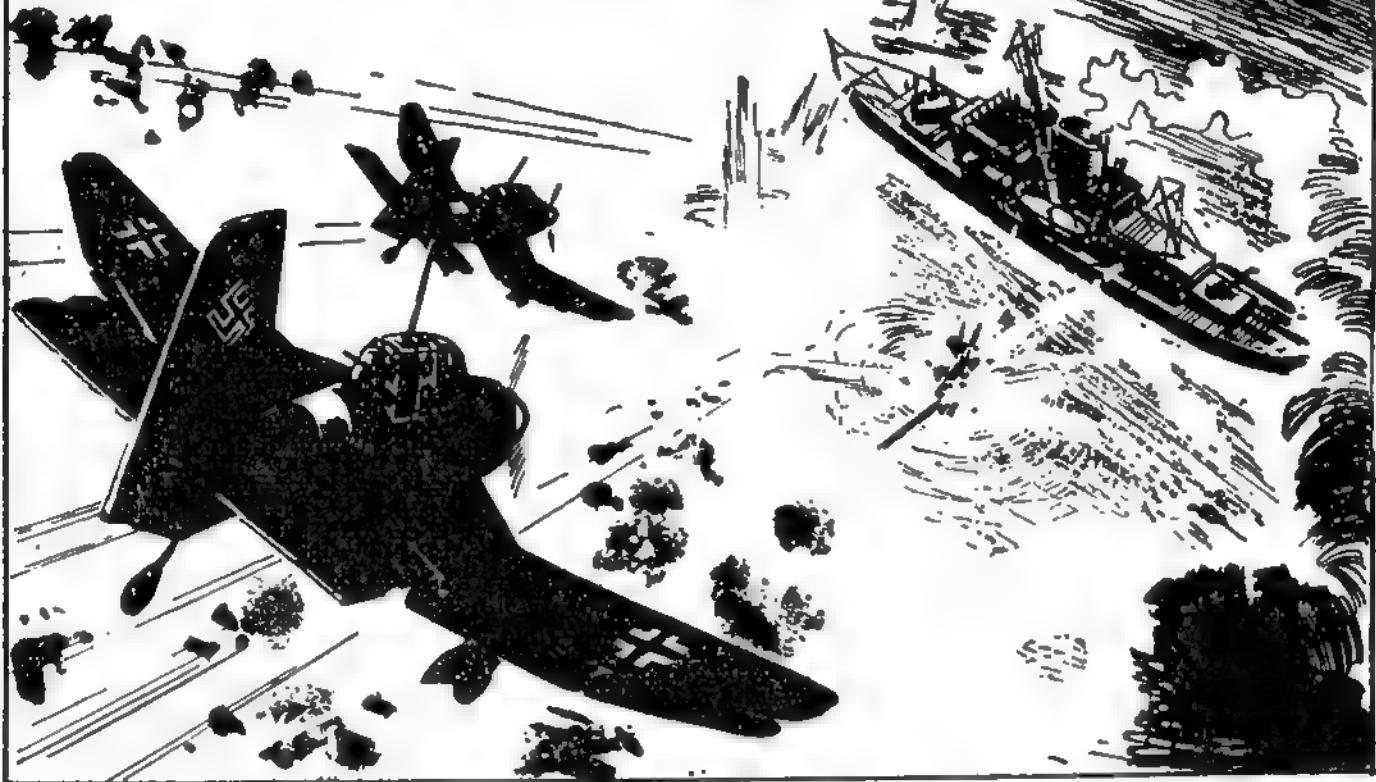
THE GUN HAD A FIENDISHLY COMPLICATED MECHANISM. NO SIMPLE PRESSURE ON A FIRING BUTTON WOULD CLAW THE STUKAS OUT OF THE SKY. IT NEEDED TRAINED HANDS ON ITS STEEL GRIPS, AND FRANK WALSH WAS JUST A BEWILDERED SAILOR. THEN SUDDENLY THE NUMBER TWO NAVAL GUNNER ROUGHLY PUSHED FRANK OUT OF THE WAY . . .



WITH A CASUAL AND EXPERT EASE, THE NAVY MAN GRIPPED THE FIRING HANDLES AND SWUNG THE OERLIKON THROUGH ITS RIPPLING ARC OF FIRE. THE STUKA STOPPED DEAD AS THOUGH A GIANT HAND HAD CUFFED IT.



FILLED WITH BITTER CHAGRIN, FRANK PICKED HIMSELF FROM THE DECK. ALL AROUND HIM MEN WERE FIGHTING BACK AT THE VICIOUS STUKAS, AND HE ALONE WAS HELPLESS.



THE CAPTAIN HAD BEEN RIGHT. THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR HIM IN THIS FIGHTING SHIP. HE HAD A BURNING ANGER IN HIS HEART, BUT HIS HANDS WERE TOO CLUMSY TO EXPRESS THAT ANGER IN BATT-E.



lifeline.

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AS THE STUKAS DREW OFF, BAFFLED BY THE LONGBOW'S FIRE, VICTOR SOLD PASSED THE DEJECTED FIGURE OF THE YOUNG MERCHANT NAVY OFFICER . . .

WHAT'S THE MATTER, OLD BOY, WOULDN'T THEY LET YOU PLAY?

GO ON, LAUGH! I WISH THOSE DAMNED STUKAS HAD KILLED ME!



VICTOR'S CAUSTIC WITTYCISM DREW A DESPERATE ANSWER FROM FRANK WALSH. BUT ALREADY ON THE HORIZON, A SIGNAL LAMP WAS BLINKING . . .

LONGBOW PROCEED ALL SPEED STEAMSHIP LANARK AND STAND BY STOP SALVAGE VITAL CARGO IF POSSIBLE BUT SINK IF NO OTHER WAY STOP CARGO MUST NOT FALL INTO ENEMY HANDS STOP POSITION FOLLOWS . . .

SOUNDS LIKE A TICKLISH SITUATION, GENTLEMEN.



THE LONGBOW HAD BEEN GIVEN A SPECIAL TASK BY THE COMMODORE OF CONVOY X4. AS SHE RACED PAST THE COLUMN OF STRUGGLING SHIPS, HER CAPTAIN'S FACE WAS UNUSUALLY GRAVE.



OBVIOUSLY THE LAWARK HAD BEEN HIT BY THE ENEMY AND DISABLED. HOW BAD WAS THE DAMAGE? WOULD THERE BE A CHANCE TO SALVAGE THE VITAL CARGO, WHATEVER IT WAS? THE QUESTIONS WERE SOON TO HAVE AN ANSWER . . .



ROUSED FROM HIS
LONELY BITTERNESS
BY THE RATING'S AWE-
STRICKEN VOICE, FRANK
WENT TO THE RAIL.
CERTAINLY THE SIGHT
WHICH MET HIS EYES
WAS A TERRIBLE ONE.

THE
CREW HAS HAD
TO ABANDON
SHIP - POOR
DEVILS!



AS THE
LANARK
BLAZED
FURIOUSLY
HER FIRST
BOAT LOAD OF
SURVIVORS
CAME
ALONGSIDE
THE
LONGBOW.

IT'S AIRCRAFT WE'RE CARRYING, SIR!
HURRICANES MOSTLY, FROM STAVANGER.
THE STUKAS GOT US AN HOUR AGO!
SKIPPER SAID THE HURRIS' TANKS WERE
FULL OF HIGH OCTANE SPIRIT.
BUT I RECKON THE FIRE
HASN'T GOT TO THE
PETROL YET!

I SEE!



HOPELESSNESS CRESTED INTO THE CAPTAIN'S FACE AT THE SEAMAN'S BLUNT WORDS.

WHEN THE FIRE REACHES THE PETROL TANKS, THE LANARK WILL GO UP LIKE A TORCH! WE SHALL NEED THOSE AIRCRAFT TO HELP DEFEND BRITAIN FROM THE LUFTWAFFE, BUT I CAN'T SPARE AN OFFICER TO BOARD THE LANARK AND ATTEMPT TO SAVE THEM - EVEN IF HE KNEW HOW TO DO THE JOB, WE'LL HAVE TO SINK YOUR SHIP, I'M AFRAID, SIR!



FRANK WALSH HAD LISTENED QUIETLY TO THE CAPTAIN. NOW HE STEPPED FORWARD WITH A NEW AND PURPOSEFUL LIGHT IN HIS GREY EYES.

THIS IS MY JOB, CAPTAIN! THE JOB I WAS TRAINED FOR! I'LL BOARD THE LANARK AND TRY TO BRING HER INTO PORT!



SUDDENLY, THE YOUNG CORNISHMAN HAD SEEN WHERE HIS DUTY LAY. HE WAS A MERCHANT SEAMAN. HIS JOB WAS TO BRING THE SHIPS AND THEIR CARGOES SAFELY THROUGH DANGER TO PORT.

IT'S SUICIDE, MISTER WALSH, YOU KNOW THAT! AND WILL THESE MEN GO BACK WITH YOU?

LOR' BLESS YOU, SIR, WHAT'S A LITTLE JOB LIKE THIS TO THE MERCHANT NAVY? HAVEN'T WE BEEN FIGHTING THE SEA ALL OUR LIVES AFORE THESE DANGED JERRIES CAME ALONG? IF YOU'RE GAME, MISTER, SO ARE WE!



AND NOW THE BEARDED SEAMAN HAD PUT INTO SIMPLE WORDS THE LESSON FRANK WALSH HAD SO BITTERLY LEARNED ON THE NAVAL DESTROYER. THE MERCHANT NAVY'S BATTLE WAS AS OLD AS THE SEA ITSELF — AND FROM NOW ON, FRANK WOULD BE PROUD TO FIGHT IT.

WELL, MISTER WALSH, IF YOU'RE SURE IT'S A JOB YOU WANT TO DO . . .

I'M SURE, CAPTAIN. I FOUND THAT OUT JUST A MOMENT AGO. COME ON, MATIE, LET'S GET BACK TO THE FIGHT— MERCHANT NAVY STYLE!



AS HE CLIMBED THE LONGBOW'S RAIL, A TOUGH GRIN SPLIT THE YOUNG SEAMAN'S FACE.

GOOD LUCK, THE MERCHANT NAVY!



Chapter 4. FIRE DOWN BELOW

THIS HANDFUL OF MEN UNDER FRANK WALSH AND THE BEARDED KELLY WERE GOING BACK INTO THE BLAZING JAWS OF HELL. THE NAVY FIGHTERS WATCHED THE SMALL BOAT GO WITH A FEELING OF HUMILITY.



THE HEAT EVEN UNDER THE LANARK'S HULL WAS INTENSE. BURNING DEBRIS SHOWERED PAST THE MEN'S HEADS AS THEY CLIMBED THE ROPE LADDER TO THE BLAZING DECK OF THE TRAMP STEAMER.

THE HURRICANES ARE BELOW HERE IN THE 'TWEEN HOLD, MISTER WALSH! THE FIRE'S EATING ITS WAY ALONG FROM THE STERN!



UNDER THAT DECK, ALREADY HOT TO THE TOUCH, WERE STACKED THE PRECIOUS AIRCRAFT WITH THEIR TANKS FULL OF HIGH OCTANE FUEL. THE MEN FOUGHT THE FIRE OVER A VOLCANO . . .



Lifeline

FIERCELY THE FLAMES SWEPT THROUGH THE CREW'S QUARTERS IN THE STERN. THE MEN WORKED DESPERATELY, AND AS THEY DID SO, THE FIRE WAS MOVING INEXORABLY TOWARDS THE AIRCRAFT-PACKED HOLD.

THE FIRE'S GAINING ON US, KELLY! THERE'S ONLY ONE HOPE LEFT - WE'VE GOT TO GET THE SHIP UNDER WAY!

I GET YOU, MISTER WALSH! WE RAISE OUR OWN WIND AND BLOW THE FLAMES BACK ASTERN! BEJABBERS, IT'S A CHANCE.

THE PLAN FRANK HAD FORMED WAS A LAST DESPERATE THROW. HAD THE STUKAS' BOMBS SPARED THE TURBINE ENGINES IN THE BOWELS OF THE SHIP?

HEY THERE, YOU GREASERS, FOLLOW ME TO THE ENGINE ROOM.

QUICK ABOUT IT, KELLY! WE'LL SAVE THE OLD GIRL YET!

HIS EYES SMARTING IN THE ACRID RUIN OF THE WHEELHOUSE, FRANK HEARD THE CHEERFUL VOICE OF KELLY WITH A GREAT ELATION.



AS THE DECK SHUDDERED TO THE HEAVY TREAD OF THE ENGINES, THE WIND CREATED BY THE SHIP'S MOVEMENT FORWARD DROVE THE FLAMES FROM THE BOWS BACK INTO THE WHEELHOUSE . . .



BUT THAT SAME WIND WAS BLOWING THE FLAMES OF THE BIGGER FIRE ON THE STERN AWAY FROM THE AIRCRAFT PACKED IN THE HOLD AMIDSHIPS. ON THE LONGBOW, MEN CHEERED . . .

THE FIRE'S BLOWING BACK ASTERN! WALSH WILL SAVE THOSE HURRICANES YET!



A NEW RESPECT HAD COME INTO THE HARD- GRAINED CAPTAIN'S VOICE. BUT EVEN AS HOPES CLIMBED ON THE DESTROYER, AN OMINOUS DOT APPEARED ON THE ASDIC SCREEN BELOW DECKS . . .



A LURKING U-BOAT HAD SEEN THROUGH ITS PERISCOPE THE TELL-TALE SMOKE PALL OF A STRICKEN SHIP. LURED LIKE A HYENA TO THE SMELL OF BLOOD, IT SLID TOWARDS ITS HELPLESS VICTIM. BUT H.M.S. LONGBOW WAS READY . . .



THE DEPTH CHARGES STRUCK LIKE GREAT HAMMERBLOWS DEEP UNDER THE SURFACE OF THE SEA. TORTURED WATER GUSHED SKYWARD. ON THE LANARK, FRANK WALSH SAW THOSE UNDERWATER EXPLOSIONS AND HAD A SUDDEN, BREATHTAKING HOPE . . .

THE LADS ARE GETTING THE FIRES UNDER CONTROL, AND THE ENGINES ARE GOOD FOR A FEW HUNDRED MILES. MISTER WALSH!

FINE, KELLY! AND NOW GET AN EYEFUL OF THOSE OIL SLICKS AHEAD. I'VE GOT ANOTHER HUNCH— AND I'M GOING TO PLAY IT!

THE OIL SLICKS ON THE SCARRED SURFACE OF THE WATER HAD PROMPTED FRANK'S PLAN. SWIFTLY, HE DRAGGED ROUND THE HEAVY WHEEL OF THE MERCHANT SHIP. AND ON THE BRIDGE OF THE LONGBOW, AN R.N. LIEUTENANT SWORE EXCITEDLY . . .

OIL SLICKS ON THE SURFACE, SIR! LOOKS AS THOUGH WE'VE HIT THE JERRY!

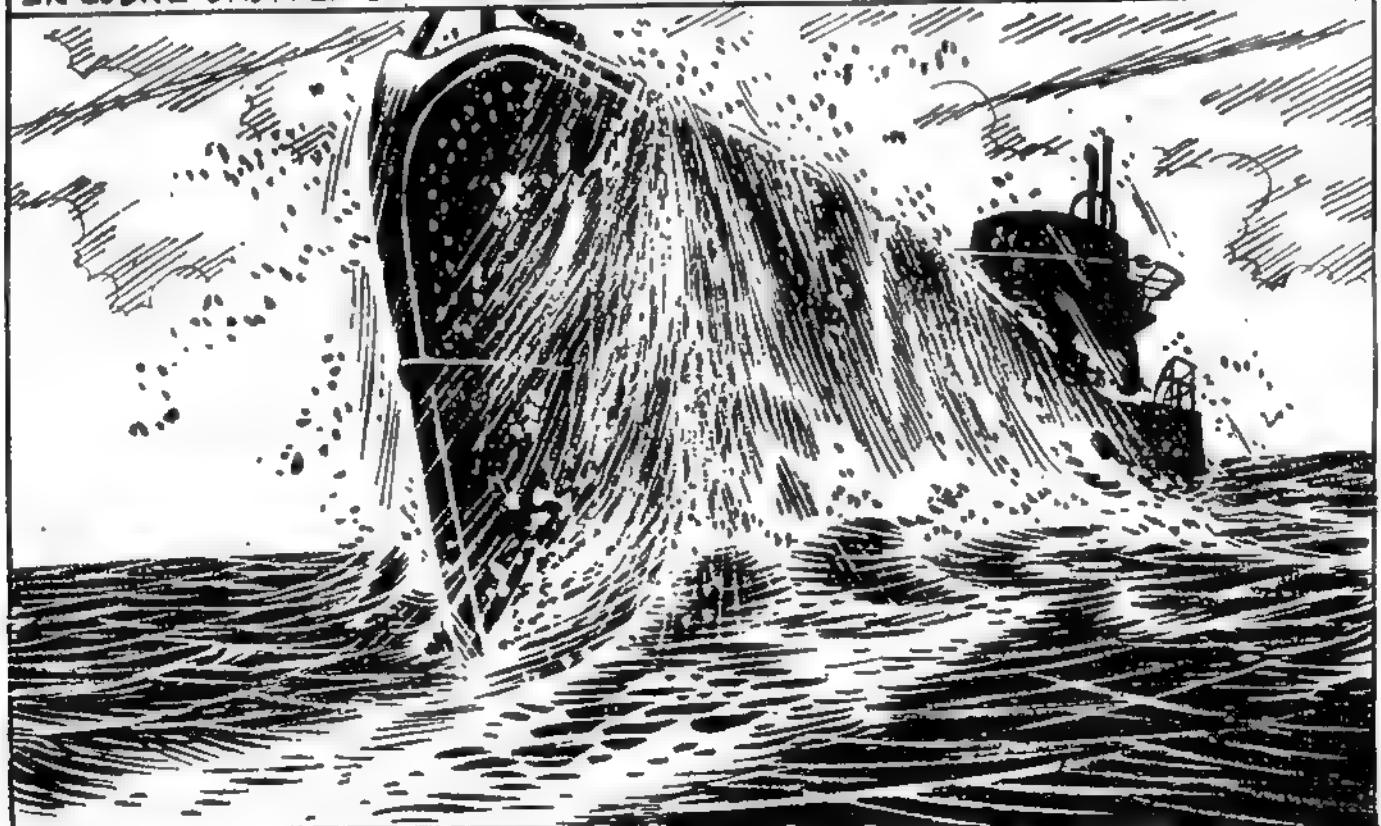
THE LANARK'S CHANGED COURSE, SIR! GREAT SCOTT, I THINK I KNOW WHAT FRANK WALSH IS UP TO!

Lifeline

IN THE CHARRED WHEELHOUSE OF THE LANARK A MYSTIFIED KELLY STARED AT HIS NEW SKIPPER IN ALARM. FRANK WALSH WAS PEERING AT THE OIL SLICKS NOW DEAD AHEAD OF THE SHIP WITH A LOOK OF SUPPLICATION ON HIS HONEST CORNISH FACE.



AND FRANK WALSH'S PRAYER WAS ANSWERED. FROM THE MIDDLE OF THAT SCAR OF WATER, BLOWN TO THE SURFACE BY THE DEADLY CANISTERS OF HIGH EXPLOSIVE DROPPED BY THE DESTROYER, ROSE A U-BOAT.



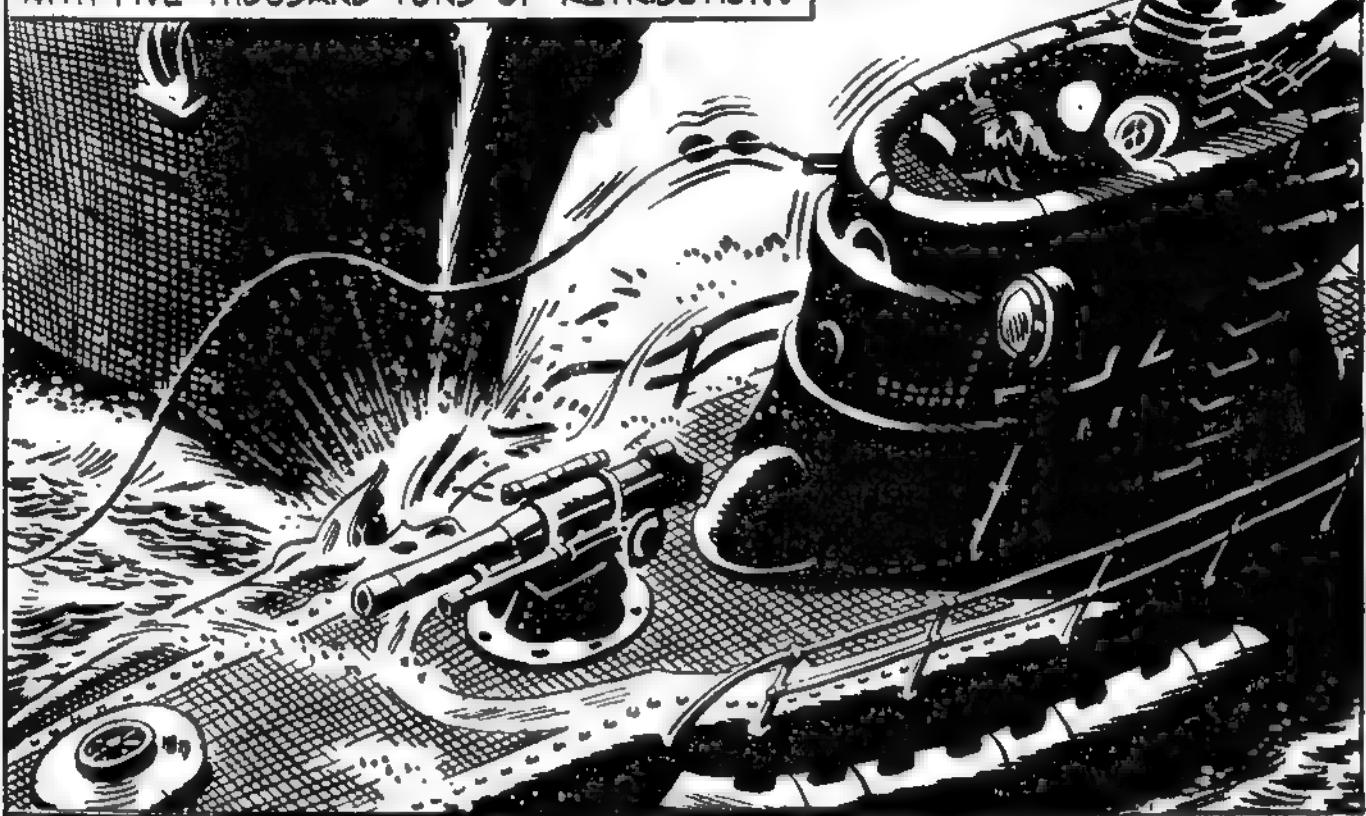
THE NAZI COMMANDER FLUNG OPEN THE CONNING TOWER HATCH. PERHAPS HE HAD IN MIND FURTHER TREACHERY. BUT WHAT HE SAW FILLED HIM WITH TERROR . . .

AAEAGH!



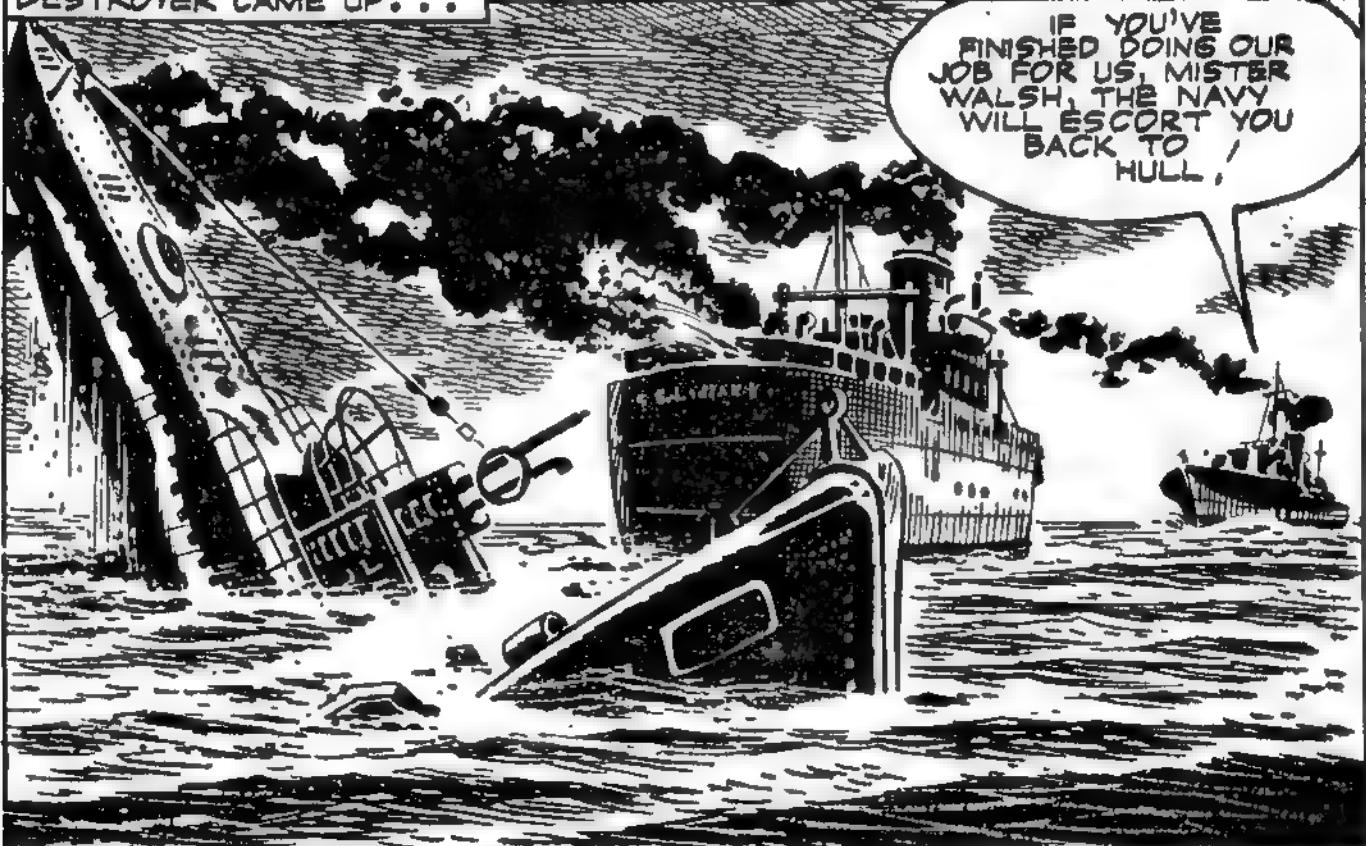
Lifeline

DRIVEN ON BY ITS GREAT TURBINE ENGINES, AIMED BY THE HAND OF A YOUNG MERCHANT SEAMEN WHO HAD LONGED FOR A CHANCE TO HIT BACK AND HAD AT LAST BEEN GIVEN IT, THE LANARK BORE DOWN ON THE U-BOAT WITH FIVE THOUSAND TONS OF RETRIBUTION.

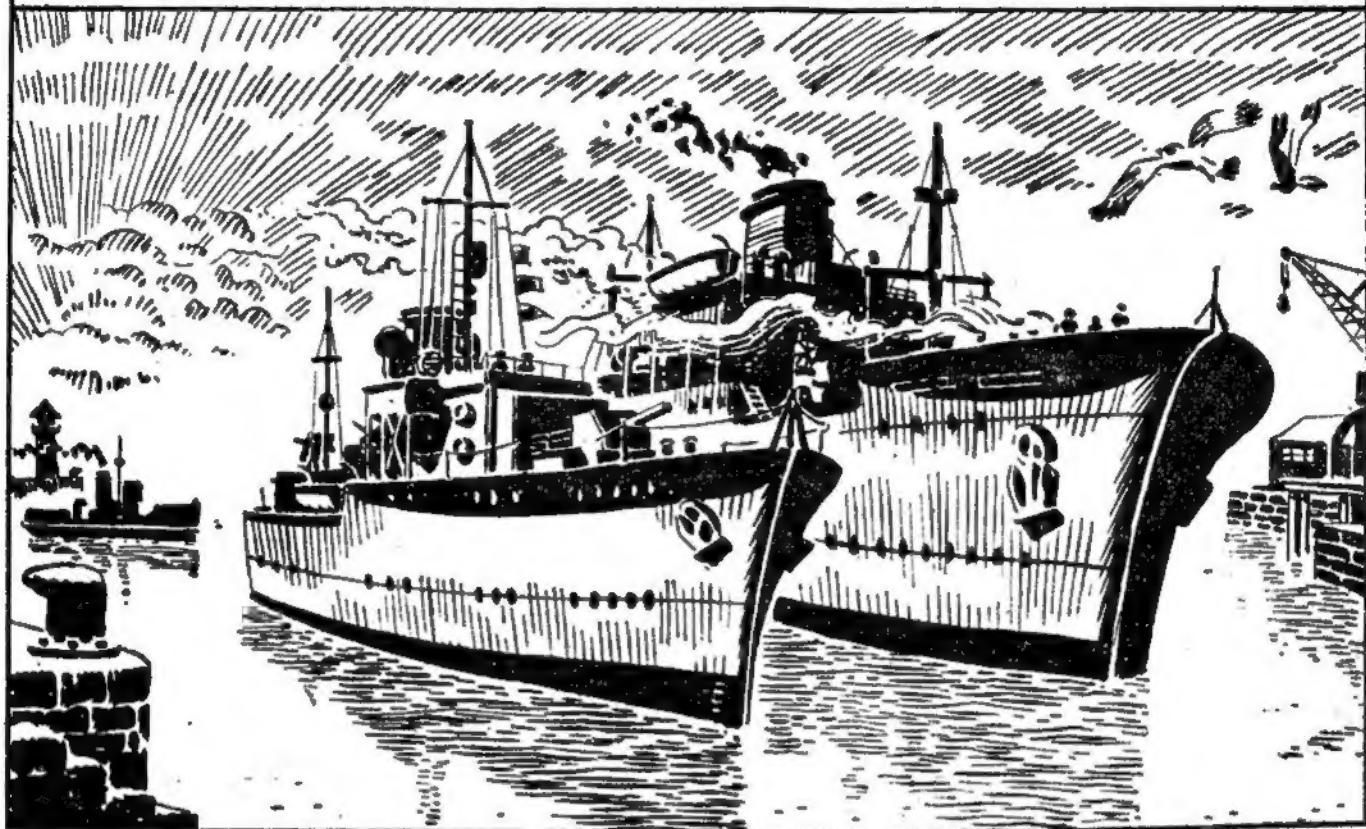


ITS STEEL BACK BROKEN BY THOSE BATTERING BOWS, THE U-BOAT SLID AFT IN TWO HALVES AND FOUNDRED IN A GRAVE OF FOAM. AND AS THE NAVY DESTROYER CAME UP . . .

IF YOU'VE FINISHED DOING OUR JOB FOR US, MISTER WALSH, THE NAVY WILL ESCORT YOU BACK TO HULL.



FIRES STILL BURNING FITFULLY ON ITS DECKS, THE LANARK PLODED BACK ACROSS THE NORTH SEA WITH ITS VITAL CARGO STILL INTACT. AN AGE-OLD BATTLE WITH THE ELEMENTS HAD BEEN FOUGHT AND WON . . .



AT HULL, THE PRECIOUS HURRICANES WERE UNLOADED FROM THE LANARK AND SENT SOUTH TO THROW THEIR WEIGHT INTO THE ALREADY FIERCELY-RAGING BATTLE OF BRITAIN. AND A VISITOR CAME TO SEE A NEWLY-PROMOTED CAPTAIN OF THE MERCHANT NAVY . . .



A MONTH LATER, AS A CONVOY SAILED WEST DOWN THE ENGLISH CHANNEL, THE CAPTAIN OF A NEW MERCHANT SHIP PASSED ON A WORD OF HARD-EARNED WISDOM TO HIS YOUNGEST OFFICER . . .



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